

Prospects for the oncoming year are bright for the Shortgrass Country. Nuisances such as floods, drouths and predators are going to have to be mighty powerful to ruin 72. Ranchers who survived 1971 are going to be hard to throw from now on.

Coyotes seem to be one threat that is losing its punch. Wolves are increasing at a rate that is going to result in self extermination. The packs are increasing too fast to depend upon the dwindling sheep population for food.

Coyotes lovers' concern for the demise of the killers is becoming plausible. Major sheep producing counties in Texas are limited to 73, thus a whopping 181 counties are doing little or nothing to support the wolf population. No plans have been announced to penalize the lagging counties for failing to contribute some sort of domestic animal to the coyote program, so it appears that circumstances are going to become very grim for the coyote, once he has eaten the last woolie in the state.

Flood and drouth control measures are also moving into a favorable condition. Cloud seeding airplanes were able to start summer rains in the past June. Flash flooding that resulted from the operation culled out hundreds of head of livestock bearing weak swimming traits. Here at the ranch, for example, floodwaters got rid of 195 head of ewes that had passed lambhood without even bothering to learn to float. On a cutting gate I would never have been able to detect them.

Government control of products complementary to raising and feeding livestock is diminishing, too. Mice are finally becoming immune to cancer. The past decade of rigorous experiments have developed a strain of laboratory mice that are so hardy they can eat cream gravy made by franchise fried chicken houses with no ill effects. Needless to say, rodents that strong are going to be able to eat or drink anything the chemical industry has to offer.

Lamb consumption is on the increase. November's consumer reports showed northern cities were showing marked preference of lamb chops over blackbird pie. Leftover blackbird pie, in particular, was under heavy pressure. School lunch programs were disrupted by mid-month, experiencing severe difficulty in moving second-day pie when fresh lamb chops were available.

Wool's rally came as the textile mills mailed 1972 calendars to warehouses in this area. As small as that indicator seems, growers were heartened to know that the eastern mills plan on another 12 months of business. Calendar distribution is watched closely in the Shortgrass Country. I know last December I was extremely upset to receive a calendar from a funeral parlor that had the last six months of the year missing. Calendars may not mean much to other sign readers, but in our game you have to read every spot on the cards.

Outsiders are going to be astonished to learn our hopes are so high. 1971 did the same thing to some citizens that the floods did to our sheep, but I think we've got it made. As long as there's a little feed on the ground, Shortgrassers are hard to whip.